

the Act, a protest proceeding may be permitted by the Commissioner.

(b) One copy of the petition and accompanying papers shall be served by the Office upon the applicant or owner, or his or her attorney or agent of record.

(c) An answer, by the applicant or owner of the certificate, or his or her assignee, in response to the petition, may be filed with the Commissioner within 60 days after service of the petition, upon such person. If no answer is filed within said period, the Commissioner shall decide the matter on the basis of the allegations set forth in the petition.

(d) If the petition and answer raise any issue of fact needing proof, the Commissioner shall afford each of the parties a period of 60 days in which to file sworn statements or affidavits in support of their respective positions.

(e) As soon as practicable after the petition or the petition and answer are filed, or after the expiration of any period for filing sworn statements or affidavits, the Commissioner shall issue a decision as to whether the protests are upheld or denied. The Commissioner may, following the protest proceeding, cancel any certificate issued and may grant another certificate for the same variety to a person who proves to the satisfaction of the Commissioner, that he or she is the breeder or discoverer. The decision shall be served upon the parties in the manner provided in § 97.403.

[58 FR 42435, Aug. 9, 1993, as amended at 60 FR 17190, Apr. 4, 1995]

PRIORITY CONTEST²

§ 97.205 Definition; when declared.

A priority contest may be instituted by the Secretary, on his or her own motion, or upon the request of any person who has applied for protection on the same variety, for which an adverse certificate has been issued, for the purpose of determining the question of priority between two or more parties claiming development or discovery of

the same novel variety; *Provided, however,* That any person shall have forfeited his or her right to assert priority when an adverse certificate has been issued, if he or she fails to make a request for the institution of a priority contest within 1 year of the publication in the Official Journal of issuance of the adverse certificate by the Secretary, or if he or she fails to make the request within the period for taking action after refusal of the application on the basis of the adverse certificate.

§ 97.206 Preparation for priority contest between applicants.

(a) Before a priority contest will be handled by the Office, an examiner must determine that the same novel variety is involved in separate applications filed by two or more parties and apparently certifiable to each of the parties, subject to the determination of the question of priority.

(b) The fact that a certificate has been issued will not prevent a priority contest.

§ 97.207 Preparation of priority papers and declaration of priority contest.

(a) When a priority question is found to exist, the examiner shall forward the pertinent files to the Commissioner, together with a written statement showing the reason for the contest.

(b) The Commissioner shall institute and declare the priority contest by forwarding a notice to each of the applicants involved. Each notice shall include the name and residence of each of the other applicants or those of his or her attorney or agent, if any, and of any assignee, and will identify the application of each opposing party by number and filing date, or in the case of a certificate, by the number and date of the certificate. The notice shall specify the basis of the priority contest. The notice shall specify a time, not to exceed 2 months, for filing preliminary statements.

(c) When a notice is returned to the Office undelivered, or when one of the parties resides abroad and his or her agent in the United States is unknown, notice may be given once by publication in the Official Journal.

²All provisions relating to priority contests apply only to varieties protected under the Act as it was in force prior to April 4, 1995.